Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Truth About Divorce, Part 1
Scripture: Mark 10:1-12
Code: 41-48

We are going to address the subject of divorce because it is the theme of our Lord's teaching in Mark chapter 10...Mark chapter 10. We're going to be looking at the twelve verses that launch this chapter and it's going to be in two parts, one this morning and another one next Sunday. So I'm going to let you know that so that you're not wondering why I haven't gotten to all of the issues that relate to this theme. I'm unable to do that until next Sunday and we'll finish up this text next Sunday morning. And then next Sunday evening, I'm going to add a special message on the issue of divorce from 1 Corinthians chapter 7. That will give you the full picture of what the Scripture teaches about divorce. We've also put a little notice in Grace Today about the book, *The Divorce Dilemma,* which is a handy guide to take you through the Scripture to help you understand these issues.

We're in Mark chapter 10, The Truth About Divorce. Now if you ask the question, how does God view divorce? There is a short answer. The short answer is given by God Himself in Malachi, the last prophecy at the end of your Old Testament, chapter 2 verse 16 where God says, "I hate divorce… I hate divorce." That is God's attitude toward a widely accepted, extremely popular and time-honored institution in human society…God hates divorce.

What brought God to say that through the prophet Malachi at the end of the Old Testament? Well the answer to that is just a little bit of history. The Jews had come back from their captivity in Babylon. You remember because of their idolatry, they were taken captive to Babylon? There were three deportations, they were there in Babylon essentially for a period of 70 years, after which they were allowed to return to Israel, to rebuild. They came back from Babylon in about 536 B.C., within 20 years they had rebuilt the city of Jerusalem and the temple. This was a modest temple compared to the Solomonic temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians when they sacked the city. But the temple had been rebuilt, a temple, and sacrifices had been renewed.

So they had a city. They had a wall. They were constituted as a nation and now they had their temple and they had their sacrifices. They had their worship. Within a hundred years, they had made their religion a ritual. They had defected from God. They were not idolatrous. The Babylonian captivity had cured them of that permanently, even down to this day. But they had made their religion nothing but an external ritual.

Malachi points out that their attitudes toward God were demeaning, unrighteous and hard-hearted. They were characterized by a form of religion which they maintained and hearts that were packed full

of sin and disobedience. Malachi writes his prophecy to indict them and he speaks to them about their sins, he defines their sins in very specific terms and he calls for repentance.

Now Malachi is what we call a post-exillic prophet.He prophesied after the exile, upon the return. That puts him in the world of a man that you probably are familiar with, Nehemiah…Nehemiah. Although the book of Nehemiah is much earlier in the Old Testament, it belongs in chronology at the same time as Malachi. It's placed earlier because it's history. Malachi's placed at the end with the rest of the prophets because it's prophecy

The sins that Nehemiah identified were the very same sins that Malachi saw. Let's turn to Nehemiah and the last chapter of Nehemiah which chronologically would be the last chapter of Old Testament history. The thirteenth chapter of Nehemiah would be the final chapter in unfolding Old Testament history. Nehemiah identifies a particular sin that is characteristic of the people of Israel. Chapter 13, verse 23, "In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab, idolatrous women, pagans. As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod and one of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people. So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair." There's a new pastoral approach. "And made them swear by God, 'You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him and he was loved by his God and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless the foreign women caused even him to sin. Do we then hear about you, that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women? Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib, the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat, the Horonite, so I drove him away from me." Sanballat was one who tried to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem. "Remember them, O my God," verse 29, "because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites."

Mixed marriages among the priests and the people who followed them. What makes this so bad is they divorced their Jewish wives to marry these Gentile women. They divorced their Jewish wives to marry these Gentile women and this then constitutes the denunciation of Malachi. Turn to Malachi chapter 2.

Nehemiah gives us the history of it and his reaction to it. And now we get directly from God, through the prophet, the divine perspective. And I need to take you through this chapter so you'll understand the severity of this pronunciation. Verse 1 says, "This commandment is for you, O priests," as Hosea said, like people, like priests. The priests were leading in this divorcing their own Jewish wives and marrying Gentile women. "If you do not listen and you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the Lord of hosts. Now it's not talking, it's God through the prophet. "I will send the curse upon you, I will curse your blessings and indeed I have cursed them already because you're not taking it to heart. Behold, I'm going to rebuke your offspring, I will spread refuse on your faces, the

refuse of your feasts, and you will be taken away with it. Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you that My covenant may continue with Levi," the priesthood came out of the loins of Levi, they were all Levites, "says the Lord of hosts. My covenant with him was one of life and peace and I gave them to him as an object of reverence' so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name. True instruction was Levi's mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips, he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But as for you, you have turned aside from the way, you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the Lord of hosts. "So I also have made you despised and debased before all the people, just as you're not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction. Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god."

The profaning was the marrying of these Gentile women. "As for the man who does this, may the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the Lord of hosts."

"If you come in to My temple and pretend to worship Me when you have married a foreign wife, may you die on the spot. This is another thing you do, you cover the altar of the Lord with tears and weeping and groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts with favor from your hand. And then you say, 'For what reason?'" Why don't You accept our offering? "Because the Lord has been a witness…and here's the indictment… between you and the wife of your youth against whom you have dealt treacherously though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce."

What they were doing was divorcing their Jewish wives to marry pagan Gentile women. That's how essentially the Old Testament history ends. Nehemiah and Malachi give us the last word and the last word of the Old Testament to the priests and the people is, "Do not divorce your wives, I hate divorce." Four hundred years later, we arrived in Mark's gospel in the New Testament period and you can go back to chapter 10. Divorce now has been reestablished as a noble alternative, a righteous behavior. The Jews of our Lord's day have a rationalized framework to make divorce acceptable. They're engaged in it. It was rampant through the culture of Israel and including the priests who were the ones indicted originally four hundred years earlier by Malachi and Nehemiah.

This issue of pervasive divorce in the land of Israel becomes the subject of the opening verses of this chapter. Let me read it to you.

“Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. And He answered and said to them, ‘What did Moses command you?’ They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Because of the hardness of heart he wrote you this command. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become one flesh so they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.’”

“In the house, the disciples began questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman, commits adultery against her. And if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.’”

Very straight forward. What God has joined together, don’t separate. And if you and remarry, you’re an adulterer or an adulteress. This is very pertinent information for us today, isn’t it? We’re forced to recognize that we are dealing in our society with more than a trend, we’re dealing with a way of life fact that the sacred bond of marriage is ruptured at a staggering rate and that the church has not even escaped this terrible trend.

Now what I want to say to you in general is this. Whatever the society allows, whatever the laws of that society allow, matters not to us. What matters to us is the Word of God, right? The Word of God. What does the Lord say about this? What does divine revelation demand of us?

Through the years, I have been amazed repeatedly at the seemingly confused dialogue that goes on about the issue of divorce. There are many views that have been floated around. But I’m a simple guy and I always ask the question…what would the people think who were there at the time our Lord said this? If you give me some kind of complex, convoluted view of divorce based upon information that’s not in the passage, then I’m going to assume that that’s the wrong view because whatever Jesus said, He said to people because He wanted them to understand what He meant. So if we just stick with the text, it’s really not that hard. Scripture is not unclear.

However, there’s a lot of resistance to this issue of divorce. There are people who want to allow divorce for anything and everything in the church. They want to come up with a…with a formula for divorce, supposedly extracted out of the Bible, that gives lots of latitude for people to get divorces for many reasons.

Then you have, on the other hand, those people who are the hard-liners and they're afraid of divorce and they want to make sure that they lock everybody down, no divorce, no time and no remarriage under any circumstances. That has been widely propagated as a view.

I remember once when I was up in the upper Midwest in Michigan with a very well-known teacher who held seminars all across the country and he had a center up there and I was up there with him. We were walking along one of the paths in this upper Michigan area, it was a beautiful area, it was in the summer, and he had been all across this country teaching no divorce, no remarriage ever for anybody, any time and if you get a divorce, it's a sin and if you get remarried, you're a permanent adulterer or adulteress. And this was his view.

And we were walking along and he said to me, "What do you think of the exception clause in the gospels?" I said, "You mean that if you divorce your wife except for the cause of *porneia*, fornication, you commit adultery?" That's the one exception given in Matthew 19. "What do I think of that," I said, "I think it's in the Bible…I think it's in the Bible. It's in the Bible, isn't it?"

He said, "I don't believe in the exception clause." I said, "How can you believe the Bible and not believe in the exception clause, it's in the Bible? See those Canadian geese?" And I looked and there was …there was a large fenced-in pen with a chain linked fence full of Canadian geese on this property which they had there, I don't know, just wild life. And he said, "We clip all their wings so they can't fly and we take care of them and they add to the ambiance of the place." He said, "One day we got a hole in the fence and they all tried to get out and we lost a lot of them. That's why I don't believe in the exception clause, because if there's a hole, people will take it."

I was incredulous, at that point. And I said, "So, what does the exception clause mean if there are no geese? Please." Are you kidding me? What do the geese have to do with anything? You can't make theology out of geese. But that was his justification for a no-divorce, no-remarriage law. Somebody might crawl through the hole.

So we're going to forget the geese and we're going to forget the hard liners and we're going to forget the latitudinarians and we're going to look at what the Bible says and we're going to find out exactly what Scripture indicates about the subject.

Let's begin at verse 1. This is kind of a transition, so I've got to set the scene for you a little bit. "Getting up," or as Matthew 19...Matthew 19 is parallel to this, Matthew 19 says, "When He had finished these teachings…" We know what teachings they were, He was in a house, Mark 9:33, in a house in Capernaum. And He had been teaching on humility and on radical discipleship. Remember, the last two messages. "When He had finished that, seated in His rabbinic teaching position, He got up and He went from there. He left Capernaum and He left Galilee." This is the end of the Galilean

ministry that we've been so much a part of. For well over a year, our Lord ministered in Galilee. And now it's finished. He gets up and He leaves. "And He is on His way to the region of Judea."

He went from there with His followers into the region of Judea where He spent about six months, leading up to His death. He traversed the region of Judea in towns and villages, preaching and teaching and doing miracles, just as He had done in Galilee.

Matthew and Mark don't give us the history of that Judean ministry. But Luke does. In fact, Luke 10 to 18, that whole section is the Judean ministry and John does, John 7 through 11. So we have record of the ministry in Judea in both Luke and John. Mark skips it essentially, and Matthew skips it as well. Mark takes us beyond the Jordan, see that there? Mark takes us beyond the Jordan. He went from there to the region of Judea, six months went by, and beyond the Jordan. This area is called Peraea…Peraea. It is across the Jordan to the east and it runs all the way down from the lake, Galilee lake, to the town of Jericho. That whole eastern area there is the beyond, as the Jews called it, the area of Peraea.

That was the region from which Jesus made His final trek to Jerusalem to die. He was in Peraea, according to John 10 verses 40 to 42. There were lots of people there. They were ministering there at the very end. Why? Because when He left Galilee, He left the hostility of Galilee. Six months in Judea has escalated the hostility of Judea. So He spent the last brief time before His death, crossing the Jordan into Peraea.

So in chapter 10 you really have His Peraean ministry. It's just one chapter. As I say, Mark doesn't even tell us about the six months, we just have one chapter and then in chapter 11 verse 1, He enters Jerusalem. The Galilean Jews who went down to Jerusalem, which they would start doing now because Passover would be coming, that's why Jesus went there, to be the Passover, Galilean Jews would travel south on the east side of Jordan because if they were on the west side, they'd be going through Samaria and they hated the Samaritans because they were inter married half-breeds. And so they would all go down the east side, all the way down to Jericho and from Jericho up to Jerusalem and so then our Lord would find crowds there at the last time of His ministry, crowds of people because there were many Jews who had moved there during the reign of Herod the Great, and they lived there but there would also be many pilgrims traversing on their way to Jerusalem.

It had a large Jewish population, as I said, that developed during the reign of Herod the Great, the father of the current ruler, Herod Antipas. So we read here there were crowds gathered around Him. Those would be the Jews that lived in that area, as well as the pilgrims headed to Jerusalem as the migration would begun toward the coming feasts.

And then it says He did what He normally did, according to His custom, He began to teach them, and Matthew adds, "He healed them there," Matthew 19 verse 2. So that's the same MO He had in

Galilee. He would heal and demonstrate His compassion and His divine nature and His divine power, while teaching concerning salvation, repentance and the Kingdom, the truth about salvation.

Now that's where He is when this incident happens on His way to Jerusalem. You could see that in verse 32, they were on the road going to Jerusalem. Verse 46, they came to Jericho which is just below Jerusalem, so that's the path they're taking.

While He is in Peraea, His steps are dogged by His relentless enemies, the Pharisees, who never let Him alone. They want to discredit Him with the people, they want to destroy His popularity and they want to destroy Him as well. We saw them in chapter 3 verse 6, commiserating with the Herodians to kill Jesus. We know that whole story. And they're there with their familiar sinister intent. Now that gets us into the text of verse 2. Let's just call it the confrontation, okay? The Confrontation.

"Some Pharisees came up to Jesus testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce His wife."

Now the whole point of this is not for information, right? This is not information they want. This is testing, tempting Him with a view to failure. I've got to give them credit, they kept doing it even though they were soundly defeated every time they made an effort, and it got worse in the final week, as we'll see later. But they're back again looking for some way to discredit Jesus and more, to destroy Him. And so they pose a question. And, believe me, this came out of some hours of contemplation. They knew what to ask and they knew where they were and how pertinent it was to ask it in the place where they were.

So, they come up to Jesus to try to pass…to try to put Him through a test He can't pass in front of this massive crowd. And they began to question Him, and here's the question, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce a wife?" Matthew adds, "For every cause, is it lawful for a man to divorce a wife?" This is no random question. This is a very astute, calculated issue. And here's why. Divorce was common among the leaders, common among the people. And divorce accommodated their sin. People who were divorced by their own will liked divorce. The leaders preferred divorce. When they wanted to divorce, they were free to divorce. The Old Testament standard had been long removed and in its place, an accommodating rabbinic view had made divorce easy. In fact, the Pharisees were the spiritual examples and they were leading the parade of free divorce. The reigning opinion in the matter was given by a rabbi named Hillel. Rabbi Hillel had died about twenty years before this but his view prevailed. And Rabbi Hillel said, "For any reason, unload that woman." The men were the leaders in this divorce and you could divorce your wife for burning your dinner, for spinning around so that somebody saw her ankles.

For letting her hair down, not metaphorically, but literally, for speaking to a man, for making a negative comment about your mother, or for finding someone else that you preferred. And you were

obligated to divorce her if she was infertile. That was the reigning view.

Divorce was just like it is today in our country...for any reason and every reason. And there's little doubt that the Pharisees had heard Jesus on this, that's why they asked the question. In Matthew chapter 5 He said, "I say to you, everyone who divorces his wife except for the reason of unchastity," that's the exception clause, "makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." What Jesus said is if you divorce your wife without the only grounds, you will cause her and you when you remarry to become adulterers. They had heard that. Jesus must have said that many times on many occasions. They see this as a hard line…a hard line. They would love for the crowd to see Jesus as a hardliner. They would love for the crowd to all of a sudden feel self-conscious. They would love for the crowd to turn on Jesus who would then be guilty of identifying them as adulterers and adulteresses. He could turn that crowd, those Pharisees must have thought, He could turn that crowd against Him so fast if He just said again what we know He said before. His popularity would be devastated. You're all a bunch of adulteresses and adulterers.

You can imagine that. I'm waiting for the opportunity to go on national television and say, "All of you people who are living with each other without marriage are fornicators. And all you people who have divorced each other without biblical grounds are adulterers and adulteresses." What would that do to my popularity? The whole population would turn on you and I'm nobody. That's what they wanted. If they could show the intolerance of Jesus and that He was in conflict with the great rabbis and with them who are living out what the rabbis allowed, they could discredit Him.

But it was more than that. Remember where they are. They're in Perea. Perea is the place ruled by Herod Antipas, Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great, was a wicked man. He was married. But he lusted after his brother's wife who was also related to him and he took his brother's wife, his own relative, and married her. And that led to an encounter with John the Baptist, Mark chapter 6 verse 17. Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip because he had married her, for John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." You can't just divorce your wife even though you are a pagan, you can't divorce your wife and steal another man's wife, that is adultery.

Well Herodias didn't like that. She had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. Couldn't figure out a way to do it, well eventually you know what happened, her daughter danced and the king made a foolish promise and John's head was served up on a platter. When John confronted the divorce in the life of Herod Antipas and Herodias, it cost him his life. This is…this is clever thinking because they're in the territory of Herod Antipas right now. They may not have been far from his fortress at Machaerus, the prison where John the Baptist had been kept and where he was beheaded. And just maybe, if they can get Jesus to say the same things that John said, they can raise the anger of Herod and Herodias and have Jesus beheaded as well. John the Baptist's view of

divorce caused him to lose his head. And when they heard Jesus' view, that may cost Him His head too.

This is a very sinister attack, discredit Him and even destroy Him. How's He going to respond? As always, perfectly. I'll call it the clarification. He brings clarity immediately. Verse 3, "He answered and said to them, 'What did Moses command you?'" With that one statement, He discarded tradition, He discarded every rabbi who ever weighed in on the subject, every human opinion, every popular social institution and went right back to…what? Scripture. What did Moses say? Moses who wrote the Pentateuch?

He didn't avoid their question. He went right through their customs, right through their social behavior, right through their rabbis, right through their traditions to the Word of the eternal God Himself. What did God say? And what did God say? "Well they said Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

"But Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart, He wrote you this commandment, but from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become one flesh so they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.'"

This is just a recitation of exactly what it says in Genesis. And there are four reasons why God hates divorce, four reasons why God hates divorce. We're going to go down to verse 6, next time we'll back up and talk about the divorce issue. But four reasons why it is not lawful to divorce.

Number one, verse 6, and Matthew adds, "Have you not read?" Can't you read Scripture, you experts of Mosaic Law? This is a sarcastic denunciation. "Have you not read," He says, as recorded in Matthew, "from the beginning of creation," Genesis 1:27, "God made them a male and a female?" Did you forget Genesis 1:27? Did you forget Adam and Eve? And the text is emphatic, "A female, A male, for the purpose of marriage?"

Now what's important about that is, there is no provision for polygamy. There isn't Adam and Eve and Sally and Alice. And there is no provision for divorce because there are not a few single women hanging around as options or alternatives. In the order of creation, there was one man and one woman. There are no spare parts. There are no spare people. They were created for each other and for no one else. Their union was complete, their union was unique and they are a pattern for all to follow, every marriage is no less an indissoluble union between one and one woman. And there were no provisions for any other people. The argument is clear. In the case of Adam and Eve, divorce is not only inadvisable, it is not only wrong, it is impossible where there isn't anybody else for either of them to marry.

The second reason. First is because of what marriage is, one man, one woman. Second, is because of the strength of the union. Verse 7, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother,” and Matthew adds, “And shall cling to his wife.” This is Genesis 2:24. This is the God-ordained view of marriage. It is an independent strong union. You leave father and mother. You break the prior family bound. And in the language of Matthew 19:5 which is taken from Genesis 2:24, “You cling, or cleave, to your wife.” The idea of that word is glue…glue. You’re literally stuck together. It is not an arm’s-length relationship, it is not a look-and-see trial. You are glued together.

And it also, that word, carries the idea, cleaving, carries the idea of pursuing hard after. It is two people unbreakably connected together, glued together and pursuing hard after each other to be united in mind and will and spirit and body and emotion. The Jewish term for marriage is *kiddushin*, it means sanctification or consecration. Both of those words mean something completely set apart for special use. It was used to describe something dedicated to God as His exclusive possession, His personal possession. Anything surrendered to God was *kiddushin*, devoted to God, consecrated to God and for no other purpose. And thus this became the word for marriage, which speaks of people consecrating themselves to their spouse, a total commitment. They become the exclusive possession of the other person inside that mutual covenant. As much as a sacrifice offered to God was the exclusive possession of God, the sacrifice of one’s life in covenant to a partner makes that person the possession of that partner. Marriage is an indissoluble union in which people are in an unbreakable gluing together and together they pursue one heart, one mind, one will in everything.

The third reason God hates divorce, not only because He designed it to be between one man and one woman, and He designed it to be unbreakable, a covenant consecration, but, thirdly, because they become one flesh. Verse 8, “And the two shall become one flesh, so they are no longer two but one flesh.” This takes the idea of leaving your family and cleaving to its extreme. You can’t divide one. One is the indivisible number. One is the indivisible number. That oneness, that indivisibility is seen in the product of those two, isn’t it? Children. The child is the one that comes out of the two. It is an indivisible oneness that manifests itself in the offspring that are the ones that come from the two. The family plays into this, then, by implication. We all understand the destructiveness of the family in divorce.

And then there’s a final reason why God hates divorce and that is because marriage is His own work. Marriage is His own work. In one of the most surprising statements on the subject, verse 9, “Jesus says this, ‘What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.’”

That is a very interesting statement. Marriage is a work of God. We’re not talking about Christian marriage. We’re just talking about marriage. Marriage is a work of God, not only as an institution, but every marriage is a work of God. Every uniting of two people is a work of God because within the purpose of God’s sovereign plan, the life that comes out of that union has been foreordained unto

divine ends. We talk about common grace, you're not just talking about sort of a plethora of options out there to tap into common grace. Every marriage is an act of God by which He bestows upon a man and a woman the common grace of marriage and children. It's an act of God. He puts two people together. And out of those two come the offspring who have been foreordained to His own ends.

This is all marriage…all marriage…all childbirth. It's an act of God. So you certainly don't want to put asunder, separate what God has joined together. Let me put it simply. Don't break up your marriage and don't break up somebody else's marriage either, or you are rending an institution of God? No, a specific union of God, every marriage.

It was God who made the union possible. It was God who issued the command, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth." It was God who said, "It's not good for a man to be alone, I'll make a help for him." It was God who brought Eve to Adam. It was God who designed marriage to be an honorable state, the Bible calls it the grace of life. Every marriage is…every marriage is God putting a man and a woman together. It doesn't go for living together, living in fornication. But where there is a covenant union, God is involved.

Now who wants to undo a work of God? This is strong testimony to the permanent union of marriage. I hate divorce. Now though Jesus stops at this point in discussing the Old Testament view of marriage, I want to further confirm what He said by drawing a couple of Old Testament scriptures to your mind.

So sacred is marriage in the Old Testament that any violation called for death…death…death. Exodus 20:14, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," right? Seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," don't commit adultery.

What's the penalty if you do? Leviticus 20 verse 10, "If there's a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be killed," execute them. Pretty serious, that's how serious God is about the covenant of marriage, execute the people who violate it.

What about other illicit sexual relationships? What about pre-marital sex? What's the Old Testament punishment for that? According to Leviticus 19:20, the Old Testament punishment for pre-marital sex is scourging...scourging. But adultery which breaks the bond, death. That's how sacred marriage is. In fact, the last of the Ten Commandments says this, "You shall not covet your neighbor's…what? Wife," Exodus 20 verse 17. Even the desire to break up yours or another marriage because you lust after another person is prohibited. That's what Jesus meant when He said, "If you look at a woman to lust after her, you've committed adultery in your heart," Matthew 5:28. Violation of marriage is serious. The death penalty was prescribed in the Old Testament. And one of the Ten Commandments is against even cultivating those kinds of lustful attitudes and impulses that produce that kind of ultimate

behavior. The violation of marriage both in mind and in body is forbidden and condemned.

Now, you say, “Why does it happen so much?” Because we are all sinners. We live in a fallen world and we are fallen ourselves. Why is it so prevalent? Because one of the realities of marriage is the conflict that exists that we have to overcome in the power of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let me help you with that. Turn back to Genesis 3 and we’ll end with this, till next time. But this is important. Genesis 3, how did the corruption of a divine ideal come about? How do you get from what I just said to where these Pharisees were in the time of our Lord? How could they have such comfort with divorce? What ever happened? How could they be so comfortable with adultery, remarriage?

There’s…there’s a tragic reality working in human relationships in marriage and it comes out of the Fall and Genesis 3 give us the record, of course, of Adam and Eve’s sin and they fell, were plunged into wretchedness and corruption. And then God pronounces curses on the woman in verse 16 and the man in verses 17 to 19. The man is cursed in his work and the woman is cursed in her domain, children and with her husband.

With her husband, first of all, verse 16, end of the verse, “Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you, with her children, I’ll multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you’ll bring forth children. Birth pangs, birth pain, part of the curse and I think even the extended struggle with children that can break a mother’s heart. But let’s look at verse 16, this aspect of the curse related to the husband the wife. “Your desire to the woman,” He says, “your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.” Does that sound like a curse on the surface? You look at that and you say, “Well, then that’s the way it’s supposed to be. I’m supposed to desire my husband, desire him in terms of love and affection and leadership and honor and he’s supposed to lead me and direct me and rule over me? No…no, that’s the Holy Spirit brand of this which is very different from the original curse. Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you…that’s a curse. It’s not talking about normal romantic attraction to your husband. It’s not talking about some kind of a soulish psychological attraction that a woman has for her husband. It’s not talking about the husband’s normal sense of responsibility to protect and to provide for and to care for his wife. This is a curse.

Let’s start with the “he will rule over you.” The Hebrew word is *mashal*, the Septuagint or the Greek equivalent would be *kathistemi* which means to be installed in an office, to be installed in an office, to elevate to an official position. Here’s the curse…here’s the curse, “Your husband is now installed as ruler over you, to subdue you.” Wow! Once you were together as a team, he was first and you came out of his side to be his helper, but you were to be fruitful and multiply, you were to tend to the garden, you were to rule over the creation as co-regents together in perfect compliment. Now it’s not going to work that way.

He’s going to be installed into an authoritarian position, it never was intended to be that way. And your desire shall be for your husband. What does that mean? Desire…the word translated desire is only used one other time in the Pentateuch, it’s Genesis 4:7. Look at Genesis 4:7. God speaking to Cain and the middle of the verse, “Sin is crouching at the door so sin has a desire for you but you must master it.” Exactly the same terms, the same language. Sin wants to control you and you have to master it. That’s the same language as the curse in 3:16. She wants to control you and you have to master her.

Wow! It’s exactly what’s saying…the curse is this. There’s going to be a battle in the house. As a woman seeks to be independent, seeks to be dominant, seeks her will, seeks her way, and as the man tries to control the revolt. Both are fallen, it gets ugly. And we know it as the collision between women’s liberation and male chauvinism. It’s conflict in the home because the woman’s fallen, is cursed with selfishness and strong will, strong desires and wants her own way and feels rebellious under this. And as she has rebellious attitudes, the man has ungracious, unkind, dominating attitudes as well. And this is the conflict that leads to divorce.

It’s just easy to break up, get it over with. I don’t like her anymore. I don’t like him anymore. I don’t want to live with her. I don’t want to live with him. And I saw somebody that’s much better for me.

So Jesus here is saying to them, go back to the Old Testament, you can acknowledge conflict but that doesn’t change the fact that it’s one man, one woman, strong bond for life, the work of God and God hates divorce. Even where there is conflict and challenge and there will be because we are fallen, you stay together, you pursue hard after that oneness and God will bless that union. But He hates divorce.

So you say, “Well, is there any grounds for divorce?” Well we already know there’s an exception clause, right? We’ll find about it next time.

Let’s pray. It’s been a wonderful morning to fellowship with Your people, to look at Your truth and Your word, it’s so rich, so clear. We thank You that You have told us what we need to know to live in the place of blessing, to keep ourselves, as Jude put it, in the love of God, in the place where blessing falls. Bless marriages, all the marriages in this congregation, all the marriages in this church. May the Holy Spirit with His wondrous power and the power of divine grace mitigate against the conflicts that are so natural to the fallenness of all of us and part of what it means to be cursed. We know that only in Christ can we have the strength to find the path of joy and love and satisfaction for life in the union of two sinners. So we thank You for what You can do in us and through us and are doing through the work of our Savior.

Use us, Lord, to be a blessing to those around us. Many people struggle with this. May we let them know that it’s hopeless apart from You. But in Christ the best can come out of what appears to be the worst. And we thank You in Christ’s name. Amen.

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